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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 538
By Turner (Shelby)

A RESOLUTION to honor Mr. Ernest C. Withers for his
achievements.

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that the members of this General Assembly should pause to pay tribute to those noteworthy Tennesseans who, through their extraordinary talents and efforts, have expanded Tennessee's interests, and earned the admiration and respect of fellow Tennesseans; and

WHEREAS, it is vital to the State of Tennessee to expand and preserve the expression of Tennessee and American culture through visual arts; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Ernest C. Withers has expressed the spirit and assets of Tennessee by means of his outstanding talent and his professional accomplishments in the visual art of photography; and

WHEREAS, a distinguished native of the greater Memphis community, Mr. Withers played an integral role in the civil rights struggle, producing an eloquent and passionate testimony through the lens of his camera; and

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WHEREAS, Ernest Withers has been capturing American history with his camera for an astounding sixty years of his life; his subjects are individuals and groups and the events which they create for themselves; and

WHEREAS, a social documentarian who records the celebrations, social events, political gatherings, and groupings that are the mile markers of personal and group histories, Mr. Withers and his amazing photographs are synonymous with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s; and

WHEREAS, he was first identified as a civil rights photographer with his coverage of the Emmett Till murder trial that was a pivotal influence in the push towards equal rights; and

WHEREAS, as a self-employed photographer in the American South, Ernest Withers distinguished himself from other photojournalists covering the Civil Rights Movement by serving as a participant in the movement, not just as an observer. He regularly received phone calls from activists and organizations to alert him to current and future actions; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Withers was on assignment for the *Tri-State Defender* and *Chicago Defender*, and often was unpaid for his photos of the Civil Rights Movement; and

WHEREAS, although many of his photos that were widely used in *Time*, *Life*, and *Newsweek* often went uncredited, Ernest Withers's work has been featured and exhibited in museums, art galleries, and on college campuses across the country; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Withers has traveled throughout the world, photographing celebrities and public figures in the United States and abroad. He has had the privilege of photographing eight U.S. Presidents, from Dwight Eisenhower to Bill Clinton, and lists pictures of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Elvis Presley, and Beale Street events among his favorites; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Withers is also a much sought-after historian and lecturer and has the distinction of being one of Memphis's first black policemen; and

WHEREAS, Ernest Withers was inducted into the Black Press Hall of Fame in 1988 and 1995, and the building located at 333 Beale Street in the historic district was dedicated and named in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Withers is an exemplary Christian who worships the Lord as a lifelong member of the Gospel Temple Baptist Church in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, his many awards and accomplishments aside, Ernest Withers is most appreciative of the love and support he receives from his wife of more than 50 years, Dorothy, their seven sons, and one daughter; and

WHEREAS, Ernest C. Withers is the perfect example of the spirit and dedication that is characteristic of a true Tennessean; and

WHEREAS, on March 26, 2000, at Central Station in Memphis, the Memphis Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority will honor Mr. Withers at their Arts and Letters "Collage of Black Spirits Program"; and

WHEREAS, he is a world-renowned photojournalist of singular skills and should be specially recognized by this General Assembly; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That we hereby honor and salute Mr. Ernest C. Withers for his unique talent, contributions, and his cultural contributions to the state of Tennessee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.